

# Understanding Career Adaptability Through Personality Traits and Transformational Leadership

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**Abstract:** This study examines personality traits, transformational leadership, and job engagement as determinants of career adaptability among professionals in their early and mid-career stages in Bangkok, Thailand. 350 participants from various industries filled out verified questionnaires evaluating transformational leadership, work engagement, career adaptability, and the Big Five personality traits. On all scales, descriptive studies verified strong internal dependability and normal distributions. Conscientiousness, openness to new experiences, and extraversion were found to be significant positive predictors of career adaptability, but neuroticism was found to be a negative predictor, according to correlation and hierarchical regression analyses. The element of agreeableness did not show up as significant. Transformational leadership and work engagement also significantly contributed to the prediction of career adaptability, with work engagement demonstrating the strongest influence. The prediction of career adaptability was also highly influenced by transformational leadership and work engagement, with work engagement showing the largest influence. 49% of the variation in career adaptability was explained by the final regression model. These results lend credence to an integrated paradigm in which adaptive professional behaviours are shaped by both contextual and dispositional influences. The findings, which highlight the importance of leadership and motivational resources, are consistent with the Career Construction Theory and the Job Demands–Resources model. In terms of application, the study emphasises the importance of developing transformational leadership and employee engagement as well as integrating personality testing into career development programs. There is discussion of the implications for theory, practice, and future research approaches, especially in the setting of Southeast Asian professional environments.

**Keywords:** Career Adaptability; Personality Traits; Transformational Leadership; Work Engagement; Emerging Professionals; Organizational Psychology.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapidly evolving labour market influenced by globalization, technological advancement, and socioeconomic volatility, the capacity for career adaptability has emerged as a key competency for individuals and organisations. Conceptualizes career adaptability as a psychosocial construct that facilitates individuals' integration into their environments and helps them navigate challenges encountered in professional settings (Savickas, 1997). Savickas and Porfeli (2012) further added career adaptability as the readiness and resources individuals possess to cope with tasks, transitions, and traumas related to occupational roles. As traditional career routes give way to more non-linear, self-managed paths, it becomes increasingly important to investigate the factors that either facilitate or delay career adaptability.

Different factors influence, including individual personality traits and the organizational context, particularly leadership styles, that have received attention in contemporary research. John & Srivastava, (1999) pointed that the top five personality traits dimensions, openness to experience, carefulness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. It provides a larger accepted framework for studying personality within occupational and organizational occupational settings. Its influence, how individuals perceive, interpret and respond to professional experience. Savickas & Porfeli, (2012) have opinion that these personality dimensions are significantly link with career adaptability levels.

Openness to experience, which reflects imagination, intellectual curiosity and a preference for novelty, is consistently linked to advance level career adaptability (Zacher, 2014). The individuals always high in this trait, typically more inclined to engage in exploratory behaviors, pursue lifelong learning and adjust effectively to new career demands (Rudolph et al., 2017).

Similarly, Conscientiousness, characterized by self-discipline, dependability, and achievement orientation, is frequently cited as a strong predictor of adaptive career behavior. It aligns closely with the control and confidence dimensions of career adaptability, supporting self-regulation and persistence in the face of challenges (Tolentino et al., 2014).

Extraversion, marked by sociability, assertiveness, and optimism, also contributes positively to adaptability by enhancing individuals' engagement in social networks, feedback-seeking, and proactive career planning (Buyukgoze-Kavas et al., 2015). While generally associated with interpersonal harmony and empathy, agreeableness presents more complex associations. Some research indicates that it facilitates relationship-building and mentorship-seeking during career transitions, though its predictive strength is weaker and less consistent than other traits (Rudolph et al., 2017). In contrast, Neuroticism associated with anxiety, emotional instability, and self-doubt, tends to impede adaptive capacity. Beside that, the emotional stability has been found to support resilience, effective coping, and a constructive outlook on career development (Zacher, 2014).

Rudolph et al. (2017), meta-analysis, confirmed that Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Emotional Stability exhibit significant positive correlations with career adaptability, while Agreeableness shows a comparatively weaker and inconsistent relationship. These findings support the perspective that personality traits serve as core psychological resources that shape how individuals respond to occupational transitions and opportunities. In parallel with individual traits, leadership, particularly transformational leadership, plays an essential contextual role in shaping adaptive career behaviours.

The Transformational leadership, defined by its importance on vision, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006), fosters an environment conducive to learning, innovation, and psychological safety. As such environments are important for developing career adaptability. Ng et al., 2008; Li et al., 2019 research shows that transformational leaders support employee adaptability by promoting autonomy, offering mentorship, and articulating a clear and compelling organizational vision. The Transformational leadership encourages employees to manage their career development actively and supports their psychological readiness to respond to evolving organizational roles, technologies, and expectations. The Intersection of transformational leadership and personality traits offers a promising framework for

understanding how internal dispositions and external support systems jointly influence career adaptability.

The interplay between personality dimensions particularly Openness and Conscientiousness and leadership dynamics highlights the multidimensional nature of career adaptability. Its Recognizing and creating these traits through individual assessments and organizational strategies such as transformational leadership can significantly enhance employees' ability to navigate the complexities of contemporary career landscapes. Future research might further explore how these internal and external factors synergistically influence adaptive career management across diverse occupational contexts.

The compelling approach to understanding the interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic factors influencing career flexibility lies in examining the intersection of transformational leadership and personality traits. While these dimensions have traditionally been explored in isolation, there is a growing scholarly consensus on the need for integrative models that encapsulate the dynamic interplay between individual dispositions and organizational support mechanisms. This approach is aligned with contemporary career development theories, which emphasize the reciprocal relationship between personal agency and contextual affordances in shaping adaptive career behaviour. This method is in line with current career formation theory, which highlights the role that environmental affordances and individual agency play in determining career behaviour (Savickas, 2013). Additionally, analysing this link can provide useful information for career counselling, leadership development, and talent management initiatives that support worker adaptability.

In order to overcome the obstacles that arise at whatever stage of one's career, professional adaptabilities are both resistive and regulating. People frequently change jobs and are less likely to forecast future routes in career planning (Savickas, 2013). Additionally, this circumstance raises the worker turnover rate (Tuna et al., 2007). According to Rottinghaus (2012), career adaptability offers a broad framework by offering crucial clues about how people envision their future in the workplace and how to succeed. In this situation, people with career flexibility typically look for a regular work with a set salary because they think they have a better chance of succeeding there (Hartung, 2008). A review of the literature on career adaptability reveals four categories of psychological resources occupational concern, control, curiosity, and confidence that aid people in overcoming obstacles in the workplace and are referred to as career adaptability resources (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). These resources make up the elements that enable the effective handling of various career transitions.

*A. Concern:*

Concern is the state of wondering about one's occupational future in the workplace, being aware of it, and planning by taking potential career changes into account. Control: Control attempts to regulate an employee's personal responsibility in career creation and displays the felt personal control over one's professional future. Curiosity: Curiosity is the capacity of an individual to learn about his or her working environment by investigating potential situations and future scenarios that he or she may experience in the workplace.

*B. Curiosity:*

Curiosity is the capacity of an individual to learn about his or her working environment by investigating potential situations and future scenarios that he or she may experience in the workplace.

The phrase "**confidence**" describes a person's capacity to solve difficulties and their willingness to face the challenges that may arise in their career and in their occupations. Career motivation in the workplace is increased by career adaptability (Guan et al., 2013). Career motivation is also strengthened by learning to be compatible with career plans created by individuals. One of the key mediating factors between people's experiences of success and difficulties in the workplace is career flexibility. Individuals' capacity to pursue their jobs and withstand work-related stress as a coping mechanism is crucial (Johnston et al., 2013).

According to Klehe et al. (2012), career flexibility enables people to develop a variety of options and take advantage of employment possibilities in order to have a successful work life and a successful career. Promoting job flexibility enables people to change careers more frequently and gives them the chance to solve issues by utilising their compatibilities (Tolentino et al., 2013). Even while career flexibility is acknowledged to be important, there are still few empirical studies that take personality traits and transformational leadership into account at the same time (Zhuang et al., 2018).

*C. Theoretical Framework*

This study is grounded in four complementary theoretical frameworks, Career Construction Theory, the Big Five Personality Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model to explore how individual and organizational factors contribute to career adaptability among professionals.

*D. The Five Big personality theory*

The Five Big personality theory also known as the Five Factor Model (FFM). It is a psychological framework that explains human personality traits through five broad dimensions. The formal development of the Big Five theory is attributed to the work of Paul Costa and Robert McCrae (Costa & McCrae, 1992), while the term "Big Five" was introduced by Lewis Goldberg (Goldberg, 1993). Gordon Allport and Henry Odbert also played a significant role in the early phases of personality research. The theory posits

that five key traits encompass the full range of human personality. These traits include Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Neuroticism reflects individual differences in emotional stability and adjustment. People with high levels of Neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability (Costa & McCrae, 1992). In contrast, those who score low in Neuroticism tend to be self-confident, calm, even tempered, and relaxed. Extraversion, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which individuals are assertive, dominant, energetic, active, talkative, and enthusiastic (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Highly extraverted individuals are usually cheerful, enjoy being around people and large groups, and seek excitement and stimulation. Those low in Extraversion often prefer solitude and are typically reserved, quiet, and independent. Costa and McCrae (1992) described salespeople as classic examples of extraverts, and Extraversion has been shown to correlate positively with interest in enterprising careers (Costa, McCrae, & Holland, 1984).

Openness to Experience characterizes individuals who are intellectually curious and inclined to pursue new experiences and explore innovative ideas. People high in Openness are often described as creative, imaginative, reflective, unconventional, and innovative, while those with low Openness tend to be more conventional, narrow-minded, and less analytical. This trait is positively linked to intelligence, especially aspects related to creativity, such as divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987). Agreeableness, meanwhile, assesses an individual's interpersonal orientation. Those high in Agreeableness tend to be trusting, forgiving, caring, altruistic, and sometimes gullible. They value cooperation and harmonious relationships. Conversely, individuals low in Agreeableness may be perceived as manipulative, self-centered, suspicious, and ruthless (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990). While high Agreeableness can lead to being seen as trustworthy and can promote positive, cooperative work relationships, it may also limit one's ability to drive hard bargains, prioritize self-interest, or strategically influence others for personal gain.

Finally, Conscientiousness reflects the degree of organization, persistence, diligence, and goal-directed motivation in an individual. Some researchers interpret this trait as an indicator of volition or the capacity for hard work (Barrick & Mount, 1991). It has consistently been found to be the strongest personality predictor of job performance across a wide range of occupations (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). Scholars generally regard Conscientiousness as a broad personality domain comprising two main facets: achievement motivation and dependability (Mount & Barrick, 1995).

*E. Career Construction Theory (CCT)*

Career Construction Theory (CCT) developed by Mark Savickas, draws upon concepts from developmental psychology, narrative psychology, and social constructivism. The theory emphasizes the individual's active role in shaping their career through three key components: Vocational Personality, Career Adaptability, and Life Themes (Savickas, 2005). CCT views career as a reflection of the self, with individuals continuously constructing their vocational identities throughout life. It highlights the importance of personal agency, storytelling, and lifelong development (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2011).

Vocational personality encompasses a person's interests, abilities, and values, and plays a central role in identifying suitable roles and work environments. It is closely aligned with Holland's RIASEC model, serving as a basis for making career choices (Savickas, 2005). Career adaptability refers to the psychosocial resources individuals draw upon to navigate career-related tasks and transitions. It is composed of four dimensions: Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence, which together help individuals remain flexible and effectively handle career challenges (Savickas, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009). Lastly, Life Themes capture the personal meanings and motivations that guide an individual's career decisions. These narratives help individuals interpret their work identity and align their career paths with broader life goals (Hartung & Savickas, 2011; Savickas, 2011).

*F. Transformational Leadership Theory*

Transformational Leadership Theory, developed by Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, builds upon the foundational work of James MacGregor Burns (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Burns (1978) distinguished between two fundamental types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders approach followers with the intent to exchange one thing for another while the Transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. Burns initially conceptualized transformational leadership as a process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

According to this theory, transformational leadership is a deliberate, ethical, and often spiritual approach that fosters equal-power relationships between leaders and followers in pursuit of shared goals and meaningful change. It involves building commitment to organizational objectives and empowering individuals to pursue and achieve them. Transformational leaders aim to elevate followers' creativity, sense of self-actualization, and commitment to collective interests across teams, groups, and organizations. These leaders drive organizational change and foster a unified vision that includes both managers and staff (Arabiun et al., 2014).

Bass and Avolio expanded on Burns' ideas by researching transformational leadership across military, business, and educational contexts. Their findings demonstrated that transformational leadership is particularly effective in inspiring followers to exceed expectations. Bass (1998) emphasized that transformational leaders behave in specific ways to enhance followers' commitment and performance. This approach is categorized under the Full Range of Leadership (FRL) model, which facilitates further exploration of its application across various organizational settings. Bass and his colleagues also emphasized the importance of identifying and systematically training potential leaders.

They outlined four core components of transformational leadership. The first is Charismatic Leadership or Idealized Influence, in which leaders act as role models who are admired and respected by followers. These leaders exhibit a clear vision, take risks, and inspire others to emulate them. The second component, Inspirational Motivation, refers to the ability of leaders to motivate others by communicating high expectations, demonstrating commitment to shared goals, and generating enthusiasm. The third element, Intellectual Stimulation, involves encouraging innovation and creativity by seeking new ideas and avoiding public criticism. Lastly, Individualized Consideration highlights the leader's attention to individual follower needs and personal development, fostering a supportive environment that respects individual differences and maintains open communication (Bass, 1998).

These theories offer a well-rounded understanding of career adaptability, illustrating how individual personality traits, developmental processes, and supportive leadership interact to enable people to successfully manage their careers in changing environments.

Thus, this study hypothesizes that transformational leadership positively influences career adaptability (H2) and may moderate the impact of personality traits by creating a supportive environment that facilitates the expression of adaptive traits.

Lastly, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a motivational framework that complements the other theories. According to the JD-R model, personal resources (e.g., personality traits) and job resources (e.g., transformational leadership) influence work engagement, a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees are more proactive, resilient, and adaptable (Bakker et al., 2011). Therefore, this study posits that work engagement mediates the relationship between personality traits, leadership, and career adaptability.



In sum, this integrative theoretical framework allows for a comprehensive examination of the psychological and contextual mechanisms influencing career adaptability, providing insights that bridge personality psychology, leadership theory, and occupational health.

### G. Study Objectives

The majority of the work now in publication has a tendency to isolate these concepts, ignoring the potential synergistic impacts of their interplay. Determining how personality and leadership work together to impact adaptability becomes not only a theoretical issue but also a practical necessity as businesses struggle with the demands of rapidly changing workforce demographics and technology advancements.

This study's main goal is to investigate the variables that affect career adaptability in professionals in their early and mid-career stages, with an emphasis on organizational and individual predictors. The study specifically intends to evaluate the effect of transformational leadership in promoting adaptive career behaviours and the ways in which personality traits, as defined by the Big Five model, contribute to the development of career adaptability. Furthermore, depending on the leadership situation, the study aims to ascertain whether transformational leadership amplifies or mitigates the impact of individual attributes by moderating the association between personality traits and career adaptability. The study's final goal is to determine whether job engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and personality traits and career adaptability.

### ➤ Hypotheses

- **H1:** Personality traits significantly predict career adaptability.
- **H2:** Transformational leadership positively influences career adaptability.
- **H3:** Transformational leadership moderates the relationship between personality traits and career adaptability.
- **H4:** Work engagement mediates the relationship between the independent variables and career adaptability

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among personality traits, transformational leadership, work engagement, and career adaptability. A correlational approach was utilized to identify the strength and direction of associations among the key variables, while predictive modeling, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which personality traits and transformational leadership predict career adaptability. The cross-sectional method is appropriate for assessing these relationships at a single point in time and has been commonly used in vocational

psychology and organizational behavior research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### B. Population and Sample

The target population consisted of early-career and mid-career professionals employed across diverse sectors including business, healthcare, education, government, and technology in Bangkok, Thailand. This demographic was selected due to their active engagement in career development and exposure to workplace transitions where adaptability is critical. To ensure statistical power and model validity, a sample size of 350 participants was determined using G\*Power 3.1, with an anticipated medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ),  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and a desired power of 0.95 for multiple regression analysis with up to 10 predictors (Faul et al., 2009). Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria: (1) aged between 25–45 years, (2) currently employed full-time, and (3) having at least one year of work experience.

### C. Research Instruments

Four standardized instruments with established validity and reliability were used to measure the study variables:

#### ➤ Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)

The CAAS, developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2012), measures career adaptability across four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The scale comprises 24 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not strong, 5 = strongest). It has demonstrated robust psychometric properties in various cultural contexts, including Southeast Asia.

#### ➤ NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) or Big Five Inventory (BFI-44)

These instruments assess the Big Five personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The BFI-44, a 44-item scale developed by John and Srivastava (1999), was selected for its concise structure and high internal consistency across diverse populations. Responses are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

#### ➤ Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X-Short)

Developed by Bass and Avolio (1995), the MLQ is used to assess transformational leadership behaviors. The 20-item form evaluates four core dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Items are rated on a 5-point scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (frequently, if not always).

#### ➤ Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) measures work engagement across three components: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The 17-item version was used in this study, with responses rated on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = never to 6 = always).

All instruments were translated into Thai using a forward-backward translation process to ensure linguistic and cultural validity (Brislin, 1970).

#### D. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through an online self-administered questionnaire distributed via professional networks, social media platforms, and organizational mailing lists targeting working professionals in Bangkok. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave informed consent prior to participation. Ethical approval was obtained from the affiliated university's Institutional Review Board to ensure the study complied with ethical research standards regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection.

#### E. Data Analysis

All data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). The analysis included several steps:

##### ➤ Descriptive Statistics:

Used to summarize demographic characteristics and central tendencies (mean, standard deviation) of study variables.

##### ➤ Reliability Analysis:

Internal consistency of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  considered acceptable for research purposes (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

##### ➤ Correlation Matrix:

**Pearson's correlation coefficients** were computed to explore the relationships among personality traits, transformational leadership, work engagement, and career adaptability.

##### ➤ Multiple Regression Analysis:

**Hierarchical multiple regression** was used to assess the predictive power of independent variables (personality traits and transformational leadership) on the dependent variable (career adaptability), while controlling for demographic covariates such as age, gender, and work sector. Work engagement was also tested as a potential mediator in exploratory models. All statistical tests were conducted with a **significance level of  $p < .05$** .

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Descriptive Statistics

Data were collected from a total of 350 early- and mid-career professionals employed across various sectors in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample included participants from business (28%), healthcare (20%), education (18%), government (17%), and IT sectors (17%). The mean age of the respondents was 34.2 years ( $SD = 5.7$ ), with 53.1% males and 46.9% females.

Descriptive statistics for the major study variables are presented in Table 1. All variables were approximately normally distributed, with skewness and kurtosis values falling within acceptable ranges ( $\pm 2$  and  $\pm 7$ , respectively; Kline, 2016).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (N = 350)

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Career Adaptability (CAAS)	3.76	0.59	-0.34	0.29
Openness	3.68	0.61	-0.36	0.33
Conscientiousness	3.82	0.54	-0.29	0.24
Extraversion	3.49	0.63	-0.31	-0.07
Agreeableness	3.89	0.58	-0.38	0.28
Neuroticism	2.65	0.73	0.46	-0.36
Transformational Leadership	3.61	0.60	-0.28	0.18
Work Engagement (UWES)	4.17	0.66	-0.48	0.38

#### B. Reliability Analysis

All measurement instruments demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Values are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Scale	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)	0.90
BFI-44 – Openness	0.78
BFI-44 – Conscientiousness	0.82
BFI-44 – Extraversion	0.79
BFI-44 – Agreeableness	0.81
BFI-44 – Neuroticism	0.75
MLQ – Transformational Leadership	0.88
UWES – Work Engagement	0.92

*C. Correlation Analysis*

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the relationships between personality traits, transformational leadership, work engagement, and career adaptability. Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix of Main Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Career Adaptability	—							
2. Openness	.40**	—						
3. Conscientiousness	.43**	.31**	—					
4. Extraversion	.35**	.33**	.26**	—				
5. Agreeableness	.28**	.23**	.33**	.29**	—			
6. Neuroticism	-.30**	-.15*	-.20**	-.19**	-.16*	—		
7. Transformational Leadership	.49**	.38**	.35**	.31**	.27**	-.28**	—	
8. Work Engagement	.54**	.40**	.42**	.37**	.34**	-.27**	.47**	—

Note:  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$

*D. Multiple Regression Analysis*

To assess the predictive value of personality traits, transformational leadership, and work engagement on career adaptability, a **hierarchical multiple regression** was conducted in three blocks:

- **Step 1 (Controls):** Gender, age, sector
- **Step 2:** Big Five personality traits
- **Step 3:** Transformational leadership and work engagement

Table 4 Hierarchical Regression Predicting Career Adaptability

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Step 1 (Controls)					
Age	0.01	0.01	.08	1.66	.098
Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0)	0.05	0.06	.04	0.83	.407
Step 2 (Personality)					
Openness	0.17	0.05	.19	3.40	.001
Conscientiousness	0.20	0.06	.21	3.33	.001
Extraversion	0.13	0.05	.14	2.60	.010
Agreeableness	0.07	0.05	.08	1.36	.175
Neuroticism	-0.11	0.04	-.13	-2.75	.006
Step 3 (Leadership & Engagement)					
Transformational Leadership	0.24	0.05	.27	4.80	<.001
Work Engagement	0.30	0.05	.33	5.78	<.001

- *Final Model*  $R^2 = .49$ ,  $\Delta R^2$  (Step 3) = .14,  $F(9, 340) = 36.42$ ,  $p < .001$

The final regression model explained 49% of the variance in career adaptability. Work engagement ( $\beta = .33$ ) and transformational leadership ( $\beta = .27$ ) were the strongest predictors. Among the Big Five traits, conscientiousness, openness, and extraversion were significant positive predictors, while neuroticism negatively predicted career adaptability. Agreeableness did not emerge as a significant predictor in the final model.

**IV. DISCUSSION**

The current study examined the impact of personality traits and transformational leadership on career adaptability, while also exploring the moderating effect of transformational leadership and the mediating role of work engagement. The results provide valuable theoretical and practical insights into the psychological and organizational factors that promote adaptive career behaviors among early- and mid-career professionals in Thailand.

The first hypothesis (H1) suggesting that personality traits predict career adaptability was supported. Among the Big Five traits, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and extraversion positively predicted career adaptability, while neuroticism had a negative impact. These findings are consistent with existing literature, indicating that individuals who are organized, intellectually curious, and socially confident are more likely to engage in adaptive career behaviors such as planning and decision-making (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Rudolph et al., 2017). The negative influence of neuroticism highlights how emotional instability can impede proactive career development.

Interestingly, agreeableness did not significantly predict career adaptability in the final model. While agreeableness is linked to interpersonal effectiveness, it may not directly contribute to the self-regulatory behaviors associated with adaptability (Zacher, 2014).

### A. Transformational Leadership and Career Adaptability (H2)

In line with Hypothesis 2 (H2), transformational leadership positively influenced career adaptability. This result aligns with prior research indicating that leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and show individualized consideration can create environments that promote personal growth and development (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Employees under transformational leaders may perceive greater support and empowerment, leading to increased confidence and motivation to navigate career transitions and challenges (McCauley et al., 2011).

### B. Moderating Role of Transformational Leadership (H3)

Hypothesis 3 (H3) proposed that transformational leadership may moderate the relationship between personality traits and career adaptability. Although the regression results did not explicitly conduct moderation analysis, the significant direct effect of transformational leadership suggests potential interactive effects. It is possible that transformational leadership enhances the expression of positive traits like openness or conscientiousness in the work environment, thereby amplifying their impact on adaptability (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Future research using interaction terms or structural equation modeling (SEM) could further validate this hypothesis.

### C. Mediating Role of Work Engagement (H4)

Hypothesis 4 (H4) suggests that work engagement mediates the relationship between the independent variables (personality traits and transformational leadership) and career adaptability. The results offer initial support for this hypothesis. Work engagement emerged as the most influential predictor of career adaptability in the regression model, even when considering personality and leadership factors. This finding aligns with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that personal traits (e.g., personality) and job resources (e.g., leadership) contribute to motivational states like engagement, influencing outcomes such as adaptability (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

While formal mediation analysis (e.g., using PROCESS or SEM) is necessary for confirmation, the significant correlations and strong predictive power of work engagement indicate its potential role as a mediator. Engaged employees are likely to possess the necessary energy, focus, and resilience to navigate career challenges and transitions effectively (Bakker et al., 2011).

### D. Relation to Previous Research

The findings are in line with previous studies on career adaptability and its predictors. The positive relationships between conscientiousness, openness, and adaptability are consistent with Rudolph et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis, which identified these traits as important dispositional resources. Likewise, the negative correlation between neuroticism and adaptability reflects existing research linking emotional instability to decreased coping and flexibility in career settings (Zacher, 2014).

The significant impact of transformational leadership supports prior research showing how supportive, visionary leaders can enhance employee adaptability and growth (Bass & Riggio, 2006; McCauley et al., 2011). The strong link between work engagement and career adaptability also aligns with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which suggests that both personal and job resources contribute to adaptive motivation. This study contributes to the existing literature by taking an integrated approach, examining the combined influence of personality, leadership, and engagement on adaptability, particularly in a Southeast Asian context, which has been underexplored in career adaptability research.

### E. Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) by showing that dispositional traits (adaptivity) and contextual factors (transformational leadership, engagement) interact to affect career adaptability (adaptation readiness). It also emphasizes the role of transformational leadership and engagement in promoting adaptability, suggesting a more dynamic framework that integrates personality and leadership perspectives.

➤ *Practically, the findings highlight the importance of:*

- Assessing personality traits in recruitment and development processes to identify individuals with high adaptive potential.
- Training supervisors and managers in transformational leadership behaviors to create supportive work environments.
- Improving work engagement through job design and motivational strategies to enhance employee career development capabilities.

➤ *Strengths and Contributions*

This study has several strengths:

- It combines various psychological and contextual factors to provide a comprehensive view of career adaptability.
- The research is carried out in a non-Western context (Bangkok, Thailand), offering valuable cross-cultural perspectives on career development.
- The use of validated measurement instruments (e.g., CAAS, BFI-44, MLQ, UWES) and rigorous statistical analysis enhances the credibility of the results.
- The substantial sample size (N = 350) enhances the reliability and statistical power of the findings.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationships between personality traits, transformational leadership, work engagement, and career adaptability among early- and mid-career professionals in Bangkok, Thailand. The findings provide robust support for the proposed hypotheses, confirming that both individual characteristics and organizational factors significantly influence career



adaptability. Conscientiousness, openness to experience, and extraversion were found to positively predict career adaptability, while neuroticism was negatively associated. These results align with previous research suggesting that adaptive individuals are typically goal-oriented, open to new experiences, emotionally stable, and socially confident. The non-significant effect of agreeableness implies that interpersonal harmony alone may not directly facilitate career-related adaptability behaviors. Transformational leadership was also a significant predictor of career adaptability, highlighting the importance of leadership in creating environments that support growth and personal development. Leaders who inspire, motivate, and engage employees can help cultivate the confidence and resilience needed to navigate complex career paths. Work engagement emerged as the strongest predictor of career adaptability, indicating its potential mediating role between personality, leadership, and adaptability. Engaged employees are more energized, focused, and committed, making them better equipped to manage change and pursue career goals. Together, these findings support an integrated framework of career adaptability that combines personal, contextual, and motivational dimensions. Practically, organizations should consider developing transformational leadership practices, fostering employee engagement, and using personality assessments to support career development initiatives. However, the cross-sectional design and self-reported data present limitations, and the findings may not be generalizable beyond the Bangkok context. Future studies should use longitudinal or mixed-method approaches and test mediation and moderation effects more explicitly. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how career adaptability can be developed and supported, offering valuable insights for both organizational leaders and career development practitioners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Leadership Development Programs

Organizations should invest in training programs to develop transformational leadership skills among supervisors and managers. Enhancing leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and support employees can significantly improve career adaptability by creating a positive and empowering work environment.

### B. Personality Assessment in Talent Management

Incorporate personality assessments such as the Big Five Inventory in recruitment, career counseling, and employee development processes. Understanding employees' personality profiles can help tailor career development plans and identify those with high potential for adaptability.

### C. Enhancing Work Engagement

Organizations should design interventions to boost employee work engagement, including job enrichment, recognition programs, and providing meaningful feedback. Highly engaged employees are more likely to exhibit adaptive career behaviors, improving both individual and organizational outcomes.

### D. Career Development Support Systems

Develop comprehensive career adaptability programs that integrate personality insights and leadership support, such as mentoring, coaching, and training on adaptability skills like resilience, flexibility, and proactive career planning.

### E. Cross-Cultural and Regional Adaptation

Since this study was conducted in Bangkok, organizations operating in other regions or countries should consider **cultural nuances** when applying these findings and customize leadership and engagement strategies accordingly.

### F. Promote Longitudinal Career Planning

Encourage organizations to adopt long-term career development frameworks that monitor employee adaptability over time, helping to identify and address emerging career challenges proactively.

### G. Encourage Employee Self-awareness and Development

Promote initiatives that help employees increase self-awareness of their personality traits and engagement levels, enabling them to take more control of their career adaptability through targeted self-development activities.

### ➤ Study Limitations

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations:

- The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. While associations are evident, the directionality of relationships cannot be confirmed.
- Data were collected through self-report measures, raising concerns about common method variance and social desirability bias.
- The sample was limited to professionals in Bangkok, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other regions or cultural settings.
- The study did not formally test moderation and mediation effects, which were central to two of the hypotheses.

### ➤ Directions for Future Research

To build upon these findings, future research should consider:

- Employing longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships and assess adaptability over time.
- Testing mediation and moderation effects using structural equation modeling (SEM) or PROCESS analysis to clarify the mechanisms underlying adaptability.
- Expanding the sample to include professionals from other regions or industries, enabling broader generalization.
- Incorporating **qualitative methods**, such as interviews or focus groups, to capture deeper insights into how individuals experience leadership, engagement, and career development.

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